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Snow Centre for Immune Health to revolutionise global immunology research

The Snow Medical Research Foundation (Snow Medical) will establish one of the world's leading immunology research centres at WEHI through a partnership with an initial commitment of \$100 million over 10 years – one of the largest and longest running philanthropic partnerships in Australian history. Further ongoing investments are expected beyond 10 years.

The substantial, long-term funding will allow researchers to pursue a bold and far-sighted research program beyond the short-term funding largely available in Australia. It helps move away from incremental science to solving the grand challenges of immunology. The partnership is people-focused and will support some of Australia's best scientists and their teams to pursue their visionary and high risk, high reward work that is expected to fundamentally change how immunological diseases are treated.

"We empower bold transformative research across Australia by backing the best and brightest researchers – and resourcing them with the tools they need to be world-class," Snow Medical Chair Tom Snow said.

"We searched the country to find the best teams with the brightest ideas, and we chose to home this project at WEHI as we are confident it will help transform the lives of so many Australians with immunological disease."

This \$100 million commitment more than doubles Snow Medical's investment in medical research from \$100 million over the four years since 2019 to over \$200 million. "This is about our family's commitment to long-term sustainable positive impact for the community, and it builds on the legacy of the Snow Fellowship program, research funding and other community-based philanthropy. We could not be more proud."

"Australia has some of the best researchers in the world. We want to get them out of short-term funding cycles and give them freedom to experiment and take risks – we're here to back them," said Terry Snow, Canberra businessman, philanthropist and Snow Medical founder.

"WEHI researchers have always been known for their outstanding commitment to excellence. They presented us with a bold and ambitious vision for Australian research – they're going to change the lives of millions of Australians living with immune health issues," he added.

Through one of the largest and longest running philanthropic partnerships in Australian history, the Snow family will establish a world-leading research centre at WEHI that will revolutionise how we understand and treat immune diseases.

The Snow Centre for Immune Health will be co-led by WEHI and the Royal Melbourne Hospital and will bring together a team of leading Australian and international researchers to transform how we research and treat the immune system.

Debilitating autoimmune disorders such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis collectively affect up to 10% of the population and are some of our most significant chronic health problems. Treatments for many immunological diseases are limited – many people are treated with blanket approaches, and in some cases treatments don't exist. Most research globally to-date has focused on a disease by disease, project by project approach, and has frustratingly led to few new treatments.

For the first time globally at a large scale, the Centre will look at immune health and the immune system from a whole-of-system, whole-of-person perspective, to deliver transformational real and measurable impacts for patients living with these debilitating diseases. The Centre will translate discoveries made in the lab to benefits for patients at unprecedented scale and speed.

As well as funding the next generation of exceptional young talented researchers, the Snow Medical partnership will also fund Snow Research Clinics. Initially with founding partner the Royal Melbourne Hospital and then progressively across Victoria. The Snow Research Clinics will allow patients to join immune system trials, while also concurrently treating those most at need with the best and latest research treatments. It will leapfrog Victoria forward to be one of the best places globally to treat immune diseases with the best treatments.

WEHI acting director Professor Alan Cowman, said the Snow Centre for Immune Health will completely change the way we view the immune system, with the ambitious aim of revolutionising healthcare delivery to be about proactively predicting and preventing, instead of reacting to and treating, immune illness and disorders.

“While research into immune health has traditionally focused on specific diseases or cells, the Snow Centre for Immune Health will invert this and look at the immune system from a ‘whole-of-system’ perspective – like we do for the cardiovascular and respiratory systems,” he said.

“The Centre will rapidly accelerate this growing field of research and do it at a scale not seen anywhere else in the world.

“We are deeply grateful to the Snow Medical Research Foundation and the Snow family for their vision, boldness and generosity, in backing this talented team and their revolutionary approach to how we understand and treat immune disease.”

Former WEHI Director Dr Doug Hilton AO played an instrumental role in co-developing the vision for the Centre with the Snow family.

“This Centre has the potential to entirely change the game when preventing, diagnosing and treating immune disease, which has a tremendous burden on the global community,” he said.

“This extraordinary investment from the Snow Medical Research Foundation has the power to solve some of the greatest puzzles in the human body. The scale of the centre, as well as the long-term backing of some of the brightest scientists in the country by the Snow family, will help accelerate this research for the good of the community.”

Professor Jo Douglass from the Royal Melbourne Hospital who will co-lead the Centre said that the long-term vision and funding from the Snow Medical Research Foundation would ensure her team could move beyond the short-term thinking that currently slows down major research discoveries from being translated.

“The Royal Melbourne Hospital is very proud and honoured to be working with Snow Medical and WEHI on the Snow Centre for Immune Health,” she said.

“The integrated design of the Snow Centre for Immune Health will ensure the best treatments are immediately available to patients in the clinic.”

“This signals a new era of partnership and reflects our shared purpose of building highly impactful and multidisciplinary research, together. The Royal Melbourne Hospital looks forward to building on its commitment to research excellence for the best of health for all Victorians, the wider community, and beyond.”

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Note to editors: photos from the announcement event will be available after 12pm Tuesday 21 November at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/ce2wwy5w>

At a glance

- \$100m partnership by the Snow Medical Research Foundation to WEHI, one of the largest in Australian history, will establish the Snow Centre for Immune Health.
- The Snow Centre for Immune Health will transform the focus of immunological research from a disease by disease, project by project approach that has frustratingly led to few new treatments, to applied research covering the entire immune system, with effective treatments.
- The immune system is essential for human health but is still poorly understood. The Centre aims to make rapid breakthroughs to allowing future testing and personalised medicine to improve the outlook of people living with a broad range of conditions including autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, as well as asthma and allergies.
- In partnership with the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Centre will seek to harness the whole immune system to solve immune diseases and will rapidly apply the latest and best research findings directly to the patient, pushing forward Victoria as a world leader in the treatment of immune diseases, and embedding research in the clinical setting from the outset.
- The Snow Centre for Immune Health will build on Australia's legacy of leadership in immunology, following in the footsteps of Nobel Laureates Peter Doherty AC and Sir Frank Macfarlane Burnet and Emeritus Professors Sir Gustav Nossal AC and Jacques Miller, and make game-changing medical discoveries by enabling the measurement, monitoring and modification of the immune system to improve health outcomes.
- The Centre is expected to employ more than 50 scientists and staff within the first five years of operation and will be a major contributor to growing the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct as a world leader in biomedical research. Further ongoing investments are expected beyond 10 years.

About WEHI (Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research)

WEHI is where the world's brightest minds collaborate and innovate to make life-changing scientific discoveries that help people live healthier for longer. Our medical researchers have been serving the community for more than 100 years, making transformative discoveries in cancers, infectious and immune diseases, developmental disorders, and healthy ageing. WEHI brings together diverse and creative people with different experience and expertise to solve some of the world's most complex health problems. With partners across science, health, government, industry, and philanthropy, we are committed to long-term discovery, collaboration, and translation. At WEHI, we are brighter together. Find out more at www.wehi.edu.au

About the Snow Medical Research Foundation

The Snow Medical Research Foundation (Snow Medical) is the creation of Canberra's Snow family and is a vision of businessman and philanthropist, Terry Snow. Snow Medical's pivotal program, the Snow Fellowships, targets emerging global research leaders that show the potential to drive, manage and influence the next generation of health and medical innovation.

The eight-year Snow Fellowship, funded at up to \$1 million per year, provides outstanding biomedical researchers the independence to focus on building ambitious multidisciplinary research programs and teams capable of changing the face of healthcare in Australia and globally. Find out more at snowmedical.org.au

About the Royal Melbourne Hospital

The Royal Melbourne Hospital began in 1848 as Victoria's first public hospital with only 10 beds to our name. And while we were small in size, we had the community of Melbourne behind us and we were ready to provide the best possible care for those in need. Since those early years, we've moved forward with purpose. Always at the forefront, leading the way on improving the quality of life for all. Today, the Royal Melbourne Hospital is one of the largest health providers in Australia, providing a comprehensive range of specialist medical, surgical and mental health services, as well as rehabilitation, aged care, specialist clinics and community programs.